

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

January 25, 2013

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## Board rejects guns in LR grade schools (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The Little Rock School Board turned down a recommendation Thursday evening by Superintendent Morris Holmes that would have allowed the district to arm a guard in each of its schools that does not already have an on-site police officer.

After a spirited discussion, board member Leslie Fisk moved to approve the plan, but her motion failed for lack of a second.

“I am not convinced that the deterrence that we gain in an elementary school outweighs the psychological sea change of kids having an armed person on campus,” board member Jody Carreiro said.

The proposal - a response to the December school shooting in Newtown, Conn., where a shooter killed 20 children and six adults - would have provided firearms, training, screening and psychological testing for 40 guards, who would have patrolled hallways and monitored entrances at 34 schools that educate children as young as 3 years old.

The board approved three other parts of Holmes’ multi-pronged security strategy Thursday:

Adding 11 more unarmed guards to fill gaps identified in a district wide security audit.

Installing magnetic locks to exterior school doors to better control access.

Working with the Little Rock Police Department to hire more police officers for the district’s middle schools.

But several board members said they were hesitant to arm civilian guards in the district’s elementary schools without further research to prove that it would be a safe and effective security measure.

“The little data that we do have is that students are statistically unlikely to be victims at school,” board member Greg Adams said, adding that students are more likely to die from suicide or car accidents than from school shootings.

Holmes told Adams that the shooting in Newtown should support the need for armed guards.

“If it has happened, it can happen,” Holmes said. “We had 20 kids mowed down. What happened in Connecticut was not research, but it was there. How many places does it have to happen for you to say it can happen in elementary schools?”

Associate Superintendent Sadie Mitchell presented the results of a survey of elementary school parents and employees that showed support for armed guards. All but two elementary school principals supported the plan, and those two favored using police officers rather than civilian guards, she said.

Out of 4,089 parents of elementary school students who responded to the district’s survey, which was conducted this week, 86 percent favored security officers in elementary schools who “would be armed and trained in use of handguns in the event of crisis, as they are in the secondary schools,” the survey results showed. Of 1,121 staff members who participated, 72 percent favored the plan.

Board member Norma Johnson said one person would not be adequate to ensure a school is protected.

“What happens when they are detained in another situation?” she said. “We’re talking about one person who has no backup. I wouldn’t take that job if it paid \$200,000 a year.”

Currently, the district pays half of the salaries of 16 Little Rock police officers, called school resource officers, who are stationed in all of its high schools and all but three of its middle schools. The board approved plans for the district to work with the department to hire more school resource officers for its secondary schools, a plan that may take some time, Security Director Bobby Jones said.

The board also approved plans to spend up to \$326,000 to add magnetic locks to schools’ exterior doors and plans to spend \$253,000 to hire 11 additional unarmed guards to work throughout the district. Holmes originally proposed 10 more guards, but board members amended the proposal after receiving feedback from principals.

The security plan has been a topic of intense discussion for several weeks.

While Jones and Holmes said plans to add armed guards had yielded largely positive feedback, others said they had heard from concerned parents and teachers.

“I’ve still yet to meet an employee that believes that having an armed guard in an elementary school is a good idea,” said Cathy Koehler, president of the Little Rock Education Association, the district’s teacher’s union. “There are more children killed every year on the way to-and-from school than are killed in school.”

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## **Beebe educator vying for NLR job (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — Belinda Shook, superintendent of the Beebe School District and an applicant for the top job in the North Little Rock School District, said she is committed to meeting students' educational needs and that that involves greater use of technology.

Shook, 53, has served eight years as superintendent of the 3,300-student district from which she graduated.

In the larger North Little Rock district, Shook said she would expect to tackle familiar issues of technology, construction, curriculum development and testing that she has managed in the past, just on a grander scale.

The North Little Rock School Board interviewed Shook in a private session Thursday. She is one of five to be interviewed to succeed Superintendent Ken Kirspe, who will retire in June from the 9,000-student district.

Bobby Acklin, the North Little Rock district's assistant superintendent for desegregation, and Rhonda Dickey, the district's director of secondary education, were interviewed last week.

The board interviewed Larry Smith, superintendent of the White Hall School District, Wednesday and will talk to Kelly Rodgers, superintendent of Terrell, Texas, schools tonight.

"I really think the superintendents' jobs are very similar," Shook said. "We are all concerned with student achievement. We have all these new reforms coming down the pike with the new teacher evaluation system and the online student testing."

Shook said the North Little Rock job is appealing because of the vision shown by the School Board and community. That combination puts the district in position to make great accomplishments, she said.

The district is in the early stages of a \$266 million district-wide school-construction and renovation program. And, like other districts in the state, the North Little Rock system is developing a curriculum based on new national standards.

Within just a few years, students will be given online tests to determine their mastery of the standards.

Shook said that in her career in Beebe she has orchestrated \$30 million in construction projects, all without asking voters for a tax increase.

The construction work includes \$4 million in middle school classrooms in McRae, and a new \$8 million Career and Technology Center on the high school campus.

"I'm big on technology," Shook said.

That interest was evident when the district attracted statewide attention years ago with a Chinese-language class through a distance learning program. That class is now taught on campus by a teacher from China.

The Beebe district's emphasis on technology is also evident in its 2007 establishment of a conversion charter school, Badger Academy.

The charter school was originally designed as an alternative program for students who were not successful in traditional schools.

The district has added to the school's mission, making online courses available for other students who may want to take challenging courses but just can't fit them into traditional school-day schedules.

Now, those students are able to take extra courses at night or on weekends, Shook said.

Shook is anxious for students to use technology, noting that some states are beginning to require that students take at least one online class to be better prepared for online learning in college or the workplace.

"I stress to my people that we have to know our students and we have to know their individual needs," Shook said.

"We have to get out of the box and start thinking differently about how we offer education to these students."

People who work with Shook praise her range of skills.

Jeff Williams, director of the Wilbur D. Mills Education Service Cooperative in Beebe, said Shook communicates easily with people from all walks of life and that she displays extreme intelligence and great common sense.

While superintendents typically are either strong in curriculum or finance, Williams said Shook "has a really good working knowledge of both - a good strong background in curriculum but she is really, really good in finance.

"I know a district the size of North Little Rock has its challenges," Williams said. "It will take a special person to be able to do it. You are looking for a rare breed, and she's probably it."

Shook earned her doctorate in 1993 from the University of Memphis. Her dissertation was titled Teaching Thinking Skills Through the Processes of Reading and Writing.

She had started college by earning an associate degree in liberal arts from Arkansas State University at Beebe in 1978. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in education from the University of Central Arkansas.

Shook taught fifth grade and gifted education for three years at McRae Elementary in the now former McRae School District.

She was principal of McRae Elementary for two years before becoming elementary principal in Beebe for eight years. She was named assistant superintendent in Beebe in 2000 and superintendent in 2005.

In her first year as Beebe superintendent, the district acquired the smaller McRae district.

"It was a very exciting time," Shook recalled. "We moved almost everybody in the school district around, which is comparable to what North Little Rock is doing."

Shook and her husband Larry Shook, who has worked for the North Little Rock Fire Department for 30 years, live on a farm with horses in the McRae community. The couple have a 33-year-old daughter who is a third-grade teacher in Beebe, a 27-year-old son and three grandsons.

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## Legislative summary (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — This is a summary list of bills (by bill number, lead sponsor and title) introduced through Thursday in the 89th General Assembly, except for appropriation bills, which, along with other bills and resolutions, may be found at the legislative website: [www.arkleg.state.ar.us](http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us)

### HOUSE

HB1134, Eubanks - An act to amend the law concerning the spring break holiday for public schools.

HB1135, Lenderman - To allow eligible survivors to receive benefits from the date an application for survivor benefits is filed; to clarify surviving spouse benefits; and to declare an emergency.

HB1136, Lenderman - To clarify disability retirement requirements and eligibility for administration in the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System and to declare an emergency.

HB1137, Lenderman - To allow service credit and current salary to be used in the calculation of final average salary for members retiring other than the first day of a calendar quarter within a fiscal year and to declare an emergency.

HB1138, Williams - To allow the Department of Community Correction to collect reimbursement from persons residing in community correction facilities.

HB1139, J. Dickinson - Concerning access to a public utility easement; to designate the means of access; and to provide penalties.

### SENATE

SB123, Maloch - An act to set the member contribution rate in the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System between six percent (6%) and eight percent (8%) of salary based on actuarial need and to declare an emergency.

SB124, B. Sample - To make certain technical changes to the law concerning the Arkansas Local Police and Fire Retirement System.

SB125, B. Pierce - To provide incentives for converting diesel-powered motor vehicles and gasoline powered motor vehicles to motor vehicles powered by compressed natural gas or propane gas; and to declare an emergency.

SB126, B. King - To amend provisions of Title 24 concerning the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System.

SB127, B. King - To modify provisions of the Arkansas Code concerning teacher retirement.

SB128, B. King - To revise provisions of Title 24 of the Arkansas Code related to the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System.

SB129, J. Hutchinson To specify that an appeal of a decision of the board of trustees of the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System shall be filed in the Pulaski County Circuit Court.

SB130, J. Hutchinson - To allow the board of trustees of the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System to increase or decrease the stipend benefit for members as actuarially appropriate and to declare an emergency.

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## **Guest Commentary: School Choice Supports The Teaching Profession (Southwest Times Record)**

School choice is often discussed in terms of policies that provide students with educational options. Overlooked, however, is the fact that teachers also benefit by having career choices as part of the school choice platform.

The fact is every educational setting is a choice: From traditional public, to virtual, charter and private, teachers have many options. In creating a profession for the next generation of educators, teachers across the country and here in Arkansas have begun to take advantage of the possibilities offered by new school environments like never before.

Click to deletelt's no wonder education now offers more choices in where and how we learn. We demand choices in everything from our groceries to our automobiles. Our education system should be no exception. In fact, it's an inevitable evolution, but the stakes are much higher. Across the country, students' learning environments are being customized, necessitating teachers' skills be customized as well. In turn, teachers can choose the niche they feel best suits their strengths and needs.

More and more educators understand choice will bring new opportunities for students and for teachers in years ahead. With these changes come enormous possibilities for the future — flexibility, autonomy, control and creativity. Choice is not only about what grade or subject one teaches but a combination of elements such as type of school, curriculum, schedule and instructional delivery.

While some may bristle at the notion of school choice policies, Arkansas is quickly realizing school choice is a beneficial option for not only students, but teachers, too. Based on member feedback, the Arkansas State Teachers Association supports the growth of the charter school movement, both open-enrollment and conversion charters, and the advancement of technology to enhance options for students and teachers. Our educators are supportive of innovative policies that put students first.

Further, according to U.S. News and World Report, Arkansas' top two schools were public charter schools: Haas Hall Academy and Kipp Delta Collegiate High School. The overwhelming achievement of these two schools demonstrates the potential for success when students have choices.

Recently, six districts in Arkansas were approved to open conversion charter schools within their own districts. Conversion charters allow choice, innovation and flexibility within an established school district. It's exciting to see more districts realizing the benefits of choice and innovation through Arkansas' conversion charter policy. With more than 100,000 students in Arkansas eligible for school choice, there is no better time to start advancing school choice policies for all students, families and teachers.

The fact is students learn best when they are in front of an excellent teacher. Nationwide statistics show a positive correlation between school choice and graduation rates. We shouldn't discourage talented professionals from leaving the classroom because they can't conform to traditional schedules. Online options, blended learning and non-traditional charter schools can offer flexibility to teachers and help attract new innovators to the profession. Our focus should be on matching talented professionals with positions that best utilize their talents.

Educators have nothing to fear when it comes to school choice. On the contrary, a new era of school choice will mean advancement and opportunity for teachers here in Arkansas and nationwide. As educators, we must rise to the occasion and be part of the conversation about school choice.

This week is National School Choice Week, and as an educators' organization, the Arkansas State Teachers Association is celebrating all teachers and their professional choices. As education reform advances, it's easy for us to cautiously approach new policies. However, it's also important to remember that change is ushering in exciting opportunities and endless possibilities that will benefit our communities and the education profession for years to come.

*Michele Linch, Ph.D., is the executive director of the Arkansas State Teachers Association.*

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## **Path of Legislative Session Coming Into Focus (Clay County Times Democrat – column by State Senator Robert Thompson)**

After a busy opening week at the Capitol, the major issues of the 2013 regular legislative session began coming into focus.

In his State of the State speech to a joint session of the Senate and House, the governor outlined his legislative agenda. At the top of the list was expansion of Medicaid to add 250,000 people to the 780,000 Arkansans who now qualify for services. The complexity of the issue guarantees that it will be on the front burner from now until the final days of the session.

Legislative leaders have serious concerns about expanding Medicaid. They question whether the state can afford such a large expansion of a government program. They anticipate that Medicaid expansion would mean the creation of a vast new bureaucracy.

The governor argued that expansion was critical for rural hospitals, whose Medicare reimbursements are being reduced, and in some cases reduced severely.

He also argued that putting more people on Medicaid would benefit everyone who buys private health insurance, because factored into everyone's premiums are the costs of providing medical care for free to people who don't have coverage. He said people with health insurance were paying a "hidden tax" because a part of their premiums pay for treatment of people without insurance.

The governor also wants to eliminate the remainder of the state sales tax on groceries. In order not to lose the revenue generated by the food tax, the governor's plan calls for repeal of the food tax only if an increase in state revenue results from consistent declines in government expenses, such as bond payments and payments the state makes for desegregation of Pulaski County schools.

If the federal courts end the state's obligation to make annual desegregation payments, the repeal of the remaining grocery tax would likely take effect.

If the state sales tax on food is repealed, there would still be local option sales taxes and the 1/8 cent sales tax that goes for conservation levied on groceries. Voters approved the conservation tax in 1996 in a statewide election.

The chairman of the Senate Education Committee filed SB 65, legislation to replace the Arkansas law on school choice, which was stricken by a federal judge last year. The state's appeal was heard by the Eighth Circuit U.S.

Court of Appeals last week. If the state loses on appeal, Arkansas would be without a school choice law unless SB 65 is enacted.

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee filed SJR 2, a proposed constitutional amendment that would restore many of the provisions of the original 2003 tort reform act that have been stricken by the courts as unconstitutional. If lawmakers adopt SJR 2, the measure would be on the general election ballot in November of 2014.

The Judiciary Committee chairman also filed SB 38, to require that people who receive unemployment benefits be tested for illegal drug use.

The first bill on the Senate calendar this week is SB 3 to create a 22-member task force assigned to assess the need for a nursing home for veterans. The state closed its nursing home for veterans in Little Rock last year because of problems in meeting health and building codes, and problems in management. About 70 veterans were moved to other facilities.

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## **Details on Jeb Bush speech in Little Rock announced (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — Organizers of an education rally featuring former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush have released details on the event, which is set for next week.

Bush, governor from 1999 to 2007, will speak Tuesday at the A+ Arkansas Education Rally at the state Capitol. The rally begins at 9:15 a.m. in the rotunda and will be followed by an Education Summit at the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Little Rock.

Bush is also chairman of the Foundation for Excellence in Education and is sometimes mentioned as a possible candidate for president in 2016.

The summit will feature panel discussions with teachers, administrators, business leaders, education experts and policymakers, Cabot-based A+ Arkansas said in a release.

The speakers include Arkansas Democrat-Gazette Publisher Walter Hussman, Dillard's Chief Executive Officer Bill Dillard, Arkansas State Teachers Association Executive Director Michele Lunch and state Sen. Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home.

Attendees can RSVP for the summit by e-mailing [info@aplusarkansas.org](mailto:info@aplusarkansas.org), organizers said.

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## **Charter school rally participant not ready to back law change (Arkansas Times)**

I'd mentioned previously the Billionaire Boys Club and their charter school pep rally at the Capitol next week. Jeb Bush will join such private school/charter school supporters as Jim Walton, Walter Hussman and Bill Dillard at a rally meant to promote the billionaires' school package. (Interesting that Claiborne (Murphy Oil) Deming isn't on the roster, though he'd been listed previously. He shouldn't be. His great effort to help El Dorado public schools is imperiled by the unfettered public school transfer law the Walton billions are backing.



A key speaker will be one of the subsidized faculty members the Waltons have installed at the so-called school of education "reform" at Walton University in Fayetteville. Jeb Bush will lend this support for doing in Arkansas what's been done in Florida (scandal after scandal in charter schools and scant education progress, to name two).

But enough of my usual.

I noticed that Jim Cooper of Melbourne, chairman of the state Board of Education, is on the panel. The billionaires want to jerk control of charter school approval and regulation from the hands of the state board and put it in the hands of a board controlled by appointees of the Republican (read bilionaires') controlled Arkansas Legislature.

Dioes his presence mean Cooper supports the legislation? I've said before that he and other current members of that board, including numerous charter school advocates, have done a fair and tough job in recent years in approving some charter schools and rejecting others. The rejections seem to stick in the billionaires' craw, however.

I talked to Cooper this morning.

He said he has some conflicts on Tuesday and he said he also had concerns about appearing on the panel if it were interpreted as a political statement. He said he'd agreed only to appear as an "objective" participant to talk about the board's work in the past and future. He said he wasn't prepared to speak for or against any of the billionaires' school package — easier approval of charter schools, state construction funding for charter schools, virtually unlimited transfers between school districts and perhaps easing of teacher licensure rules, among others.

Does Cooper think the Board is doing a good job now in regulation of charter schools?

"I think they are doing a good job. Obviously, we may have made mistakes through the years. There may have been some that got through that shouldn't have, but many were turned down and rightfully so."

He added that it had been time-consuming and hard work for the board. But, "I feel pretty comfortable with the way I've voted through the years."

He said he didn't want to compromise his objectivity as board chairman by participation next week. "I may have to think hard about that the next few days."

UPDATE: I also asked Sen. James McLean, a Democrat, if his participation constituted an endorsement of the billionaires' agenda:

No sir. I am interested in listening to everybody and finding out as much as I can about all viewpoints

## NEWS RELEASE

A+ Arkansas announced today it will host an Education Rally and Summit in conjunction with National School Choice Week, on Tuesday, January 29, 2013, in Little Rock. The Rally will begin at 9:15 a.m. at the Arkansas State Capitol Rotunda and will feature keynote speaker Jeb Bush, former governor of Florida from 1999-2007 and

chairman of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, as well as Mr. Jim Walton, Chairman and CEO of Arvest Bank Group Inc.

Immediately following the Rally at 11:30 a.m., A+ Arkansas will host an Education Summit at the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Little Rock. This event includes a free lunch for those who RSVP at [info@aplusarkansas.org](mailto:info@aplusarkansas.org) and panel discussions by teachers, administrators, business leaders, educational experts and policymakers.

Dr. Patrick J. Wolf is professor and 21st Century Endowed Chair in School Choice in the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions. Wolf will join parents, educators, business leaders and policymakers to discuss the education crisis facing Arkansas. Attendees will also have the opportunity to play an active role in the discussion during Q&A sessions throughout the summit.

"The research record is strong: parental school choice improves outcomes for students, parents, and the broader community," Wolf stated.

Previously, Wolf taught at Georgetown and Columbia University. As principal investigator of the School Choice Demonstration Project, he is leading the impact evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program through a contract with the U.S. Department of Education (subcontract with Westat) and is overseeing a national research team conducting an independent longitudinal multi-method evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

Other Speakers include:

Walter Hussman- Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and President of WEHCO Media, Inc.

Bill Dillard- CEO Dillards

John Bacon- Chief Executive Officer, eStem Public Charter Schools

Michele Linch- Executive Director Arkansas State Teachers Association

Jim Cooper- Chairman of the State Board of Education

Leslie Hiner- Vice President of Programs & State Relations at Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice

Arkansas State Representative Mark Biviano (R)

Arkansas State Representative James McLean (D)

Arkansas State Senator Johnny Key (R)

Georgia State Representative Alisha Morgan (D)

T. Willard Fair- Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League of Greater Miami, Inc.

Angela F. Shirey- Teach For America Director of Development

Virginia Walden Ford- Executive Director of Arkansas Parent Network

Luke Gordy — Executive Director of the Arkansas for Education Reform Foundation

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